



Country Report for Hungary

Work Package: WP01 - Regulation & policy framework regarding production, use, and transparency of organic seed

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Main Author: Maaïke Raaijmakers (Bionext, Netherlands)

Local partner involved in the visit and the revision of the report: ÖMki

WP Leader: Freya Schaefer (FiBL-DE)



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About the report

This report has been produced in the framework of the Horizon 2020-funded project LIVESEED.¹ The main aim of LIVESEED is to boost the production and use of organic seeds and plant breeding for organic agriculture across Europe. It is co-ordinated by IFOAM EU, and its scientific coordinator is FiBL-CH.

Work Package 01 of LIVESEED explores EU Member States in terms of their implementation and best practices connected to the EU Organic Regulations, in the contexts of national regulatory and policy frameworks, specifically regarding the production, use, and transparency of organic seed.

As part of this Work Package, Bionext, FiBL-DE and IFOAM EU visited selected countries during 2017-2018, where the organic seed production is low, to understand their bottlenecks and possibilities for improvements regarding the production and the use of organic seeds at the national level. During the visits, several stakeholder groups were interviewed (competent authorities, seed database managers, seed companies, research institutions, organic farmers, seed associations, organic certifiers, etc) in each country.

The main outcomes of the visits were summarized in country reports presenting the status quo for that given Member State. The reports' findings then were disseminated among a wide range of national stakeholders in 2019 and discussed during workshops to define viable next steps to improve the status quo in each country. The Workshop for Hungary took place on 12th March 2019, in Budapest, and was co-organised by our LIVESEED project partner Ökológiai Mezőgazdasági Kutatóintézet (ÖMKi).

This country report is recommended for national policymakers, and all stakeholders involved in the production and use of organic seed: national authorities, farmers, certifiers, producers, retailers, seed authorities, researchers and the civil society in general.

For further information concerning this report, please contact:

Ms. Maaïke Raaijmakers: raaijmakers@bionext.nl

Bionext is the Dutch chain organization for organic agriculture and food.

For further information concerning the LIVESEED project, please contact:

IFOAM EU Group

Bram Moeskops: bram.moeskops@ifoam-eu.org

Visit our website: liveseed.eu, and our social media: Facebook and Twitter: LIVESEEDeu

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¹ <http://liveseed.eu>



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Implementation of the regulation on organic seed

Findings from the national visit to Hungary 21-24 November 2017

1. General information

There are 3,414 organic farmers in Hungary covering 4 % (=186,000 hectare) of the agricultural land area. From this area 56,3 % is grassland, 39,3% is covered with arable crops and 4,4% are permanent crops. Source: IFOAM EU 2016

2. Production and use of organic seed

The Hungarian Seed Association (Vetőmag Szövetség) has around 800 members. Membership of this association is obligatory if you want to sell seeds in Hungary. Over 400 members are seed companies, around 160 are farmers and the rest are seed trading companies. The seed companies are mainly Hungarian companies that produce for the Hungarian market.

According to the organic certifier Biokontroll Hungária, there are between 30 and 40 certified organic seed producers in Hungary. Farmers and research institutes are the main providers of organic seed. The farmers multiply the basic seed and the cleaning is done by subcontractors. Still there is very little certified organic seed on the Hungarian market. Organic seed companies do not necessarily produce organic seed every year, production depends on the demand. Often organic seeds are produced on a contractual basis, and seeds are certified and sold abroad. There is also a lot of farm saved seed used in Hungary. Organic farmers may re-use their own seed, and this is accepted as organic seed by the law.

3. Implementation of the EU regulation: the database and derogation policy

The National Food Chain Safety Office (NÉBIH) is responsible for the management of the organic seed database. To enter seed on the database, seed suppliers fill in a registration form, which contains relevant information about the supplier, organic seed species, variety, amount of seed, lot number, availability, etc. NÉBIH receives information from the suppliers if stocks are no longer available and keeps the database up to date.

The amount of seed lots and suppliers on the database differs per year. In 2017, one company offered organic vegetable seeds of 25 varieties on the database. In addition, one fodder pea and three fodder maize varieties were offered on the database.

Not all organic seed is on the database. Organic farmers can find and sell organic seed outside the database through direct sale. If they have already a buyer for their seed, they do not put it on the database anymore. Farmers do not see the purpose of selling seed via the database. If it is on the database there is a risk of not selling their organic seed.

Farmers can get a derogation if no organic seeds are available on the database from a variety that they wish to grow. Derogations are granted by the certification bodies (Biokontroll Hungária Nonprofit Kft. or Hungária Öko Garancia) who report to the competent authority (NÉBIH).



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4. Policy measures to increase production and use of organic seed

Members to the Seed Association receive the organic certification (from Biokontroll Hungária) free of charge.

5. Breeding research and field trials

The Agricultural Institute, Centre for Agricultural Research, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA ATK) has an organic plant breeding programme in cereals. They produce organic einkorn and emmer varieties. They produce pre-basic and basic seeds and sell them to seed companies or farmers that produce seeds. For spelt and wheat this is organized by the company Elitmag (<https://elitmag.hu>) which was established by MTA ATK and also owned in majority. They only produce organic seed if the farmers order in advance.

There is also a Potato Research Institute in Keszthely, part of the Pannon University. This Institute has a broad range of conventional resistant varieties, which can be suitable for organic cultivation as well. There are no official organic field trials in Hungary but the Hungarian Research Centre for Organic Agriculture (ÖMKI) conducts on-farm trials to test the performance of winter wheat varieties under organic conditions.

6. Constraints and opportunities

There is no market demand for organic seeds, and therefore, there is no economic incentive to produce organic seed for the Hungarian market.

The organic seed database does not function very well. Most seeds are now sold through direct sales from farmer to farmer. If one puts their seed on the database it might not be sold.

Organic seed production has a high risk. It is difficult for farmers to reach the quality standards needed for certification.

The varieties which are multiplied under organic conditions do not always meet the demand of the organic farmer. There are more than 300 wheat varieties available in Hungary; but only 3 of them are on the organic seed database. So, the choice on the database is very limited for the farmers.

The price of organic seed is a bottleneck. The price difference with conventional seed is on average 50%.

There is not enough untreated conventional seed on the market either. Farmers must order their untreated seed in advance. Some seed companies refuse to sell untreated seed; in their opinion the public law it is obligating them to treat the seed.

An opportunity is a contract between MTA ATK and the company Naturgold. Naturgold sells the organic seeds to farmers and buys back the product they produce. This reduces the financial risk for the farmers. This example, using a closed contracting system, could be applied to other crops and companies and would increase the organic seed use in Hungary.

Another opportunity is the fact that all stakeholders, including the Ministry of Agriculture, acknowledge the importance of organic variety trials and want to cooperate to realize this.



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7. Recommendations from the stakeholders

- To create a market for organic seeds, the higher costs of the seed must be compensated by a better performance of the variety.
- To find out which varieties are most suitable for organic production, and therefore are performing better, organic variety trials must be organized.
- It should be compulsory in the organic report (made by farmers annually) to mention the name of the varieties used, and not only the species. Currently 95% of varieties reported by organic farmers to the control bodies are listed as unknown.
- An expert group for organic seed could boost the organic seed sector gathering and distributing the knowledge in the sector.
- To improve the quality of farm saved seed, farmers need training and seed cleaning facilities.

8. More information

Organic seed database: <http://portal.nebih.gov.hu/oko-vetomag>

Biokultura: www.gfar.net/organizations/hungarian-association-organic-farmers-biokultura

ÖMKi: <https://biokutatas.hu/about-us/>

MTA-ATK: www.mta-atk.hu



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